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# Migration and Traces of Religious Architecture in European Urban Areas: Perceptions of Youths

## Part 2: First Results from three Research Sites

*Benjamin Hintze/Anders Vassenden/Roger Hewitt with Vicky Skiftou*

### Abstract

The authors describe their respective research sites in Hamburg-St. Georg, Old Oslo/Grønland and the Finsbury Park area of London as part of the “The Architecture of Contemporary Religious Transmission” project. In these sites they conducted approx. 50 interviews with religious – both Christian and Muslim – and non-religious youth. All three areas have been strongly influenced by migration and the religions it has introduced to these urban areas. In this context the authors embed preliminary findings from each site. The section on Hamburg-St. Georg deals with a mosque as a space of education and venue of transmission of Islamic knowledge among Muslim youth leading to the objectification of Islam. The project partner researching in Old Oslo/Grønland encounters the phenomenon of ethnicity/race as mediator and ocular signifier of religiosity and how both Muslim and Christian youth frame their narratives on religion in a language of individualism. In Finsbury Park the authors find new dialogic engagements with faith amongst Muslim youth and the visibility of re-evaluated materialism amongst migrant and pentecostal Christians.

*Key words:* Migration, Youth, Religiosity, Identity, international comparison

### Migration und Spuren religiöser Architektur in europäischen Großstädten: Wahrnehmungen Jugendlicher

Teil II: Erste Resultate aus drei Forschungsstandorten

### Zusammenfassung

Die Autoren beschreiben die drei Forschungsstandorte des „The Architecture of Contemporary Religious Transmission“-Projektes: Hamburg-St. Georg, Alt-Oslo/Grønland und Finsbury Park, London. Hier führten sie ca. 50 Interviews sowohl mit religiösen – christlichen und muslimischen – als auch mit nicht-religiösen jungen Erwachsenen durch. Alle drei urbanen Räume sind stark von Migration und der durch sie mitgebrachten Religionen geprägt. In diese lokalen Kontexte betten die Autoren erste Forschungsergebnisse aus drei Forschungsstandorten ein. Der Teil über Hamburg-St. Georg behandelt eine Moschee als Bildungsstandort und Ort, an dem islamisches Wissen übertragen wird. Die Projektpartner in Old Oslo/Grønland begegnen dem Phänomen der Ethnizität/Rasse als Mediator und sichtbare Kennzeichnung von Religiosität. Sowohl junge Muslime als auch junge Christen formulieren ihre Narrationen in einer Sprache der Individualität. In Finsbury Park sind die Autoren einer dialogischen Auseinandersetzung der jugendlichen Muslime mit ihrem Glauben und einer Neubewertung des Materialismus bei zugewanderten pentekostalen Christen auf der Spur.

*Schlagworte:* Migration, Jugendliche, Religiosität, Identität und internationaler Vergleich



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This contribution will first profile the three research areas of the NORFACE project "The Contemporary Architecture of Religious Transmission" introduced earlier in this issue and then shed light onto a selection of preliminary findings and reflections. Despite the similarities between the three contexts e.g. in regards to population and migration, there are many historic, ethnic, national and socio-cultural differences that must be taken into consideration. In combination with the different scientific portfolios of the partner institutions the emerging analytical threads will allow us to compare the results while unearthing local and national particularities. The findings in the following are preliminary as we are currently beginning to venture from the interview into the analysis phase.

### Research Site I: Centrum-Moschee in Hamburg-St. Georg

Muslims of this sample share the same social and physical space: the Centrum-Moschee

For the purpose of this article the Hamburg case study will focus solely on the Muslim sample. In contrast to our project partners in London and Oslo, which recruited from several Muslim institutions, we recruited our entire sample from a single social context and institutional frame. All of the young Muslims in our sample in varying degrees traverse in the same social and physical space: the *Centrum-Moschee* – arguably the most important mosque with the largest congregation in Hamburg – is highly engaged in local politics, inter-religious dialogue and public relations. Yet the relationship the mosque has with its surroundings and how it is perceived by the public is charged with ambivalence, as the mosque has come under the critical gaze of the *Verfassungsschutz* (Federal Office of the Protection of the Constitution).

### Profile of St. Georg

The district St. Georg, which is part of the greater borough of *Hamburg-Mitte*, lies in the heart of the city and borders in the South on the *Hauptbahnhof* (main train station) and in the west on the *Alster Lake*. Two main traffic arteries flow through the area, which both divide the district and exemplify the many contrasts St. Georg embodies. The *Lange Reihe*, a pulsating street lined with cafes and boutiques, is home to the highest density of male homosexuals in Hamburg. In the area between the *Lange Reihe* and the *Alster Lake* mostly newly renovated *Gründerzeit* and *Jugendstil* buildings stand, housing luxury hotels and condominiums. The *Steindamm* on the other hand symbolizes the "other" side of the district. Here sex shops stand next to grocery shops owned by migrants, betting agencies, casinos and hour hotels. St. Georg also features aspects common to transit areas, such as an open drug and drug prostitution scene. Further down *Steindamm* there is an area dominated by migrant infrastructure and mosques, marking the traces that migration left on the neighbourhood.

St. Georg is one of Hamburg's oldest districts and since its founding has been a space for the marginalized, subaltern, migrants and social outcasts. The district's current dimensions were established after World War II, when St. Georg became the home for homeless and refugees. In the course of reconstructing the area the city decided to make *Steindamm* a four lane thoroughfare dividing the district in half. The centre of the district shifted to the *Lange Reihe* which had not been destroyed during the war. In 1979, this area became Hamburg's first senate funded urban renewal zone, which meant the decrepit *Gründerzeit* and *Jugendstil* buildings were renovated and sold as condominiums, driving up the real estate prices and concomitantly the cost of living.

St. Georg is one of Hamburg's oldest districts and has been a space for migrants and social outcasts

With the beginning of the labour migration into Germany in 1960 many migrants settled in St. Georg, where the rents were low, apartments were available and the labour-intense industry was located nearby in and along Hamburg's harbour. In the 1980s St. Georg registered in the public perception as red light and drug consumption district. In addition, in 1992 over 3,000 refugees from former Yugoslavia were housed in parts of St. Georg. The social structure of the area was well below the city average and by mid-1990s over 56 percent of the inhabitants were non-Germans originally from over 100 countries (Joho 2005).

History of the district

The urban renewal project has come to an end, but is still felt in a gentrification process of unrivalled speed in Hamburg. The venerable and infamous St. Georg is changing its face and mutating into an "In"-borough (Bültmann 2008). Many affluent singles or couples without children continue to move to St. Georg, which is reflected in the demographics of the area: Since 1990 the percentage of inhabitants under 18 years of age has decreased from 15.5 percent to 9.2 percent, which is far below the city average of 15.7 percent (Statistikamt NORD 2007). Today 10,551 people live in St. Georg in a total area of 1.8 Km<sup>2</sup>, 31.4 percent of whom do not have a German passport, compared to 14.8 percent in Hamburg.

St Georg is changing into an 'In'-borough

It is increasingly difficult for migrant business owners and less affluent St. Georgers to pay the rent. Combined with the many upwardly mobile second generation migrants, who have managed to move to safer and higher status areas, this is the reason for the decrease of migrants living in St. Georg. This is especially the case for our sample; only the minority of our Muslims lives in the area, instead returning only to practice their religion and meet their friends.

The minority of the Muslims, presented in the study, live in the area

## The Centrum-Moschee Hamburg e.V.

The building housing the Centrum-Moschee – the physical space of the Muslim congregation in St. Georg – has an interesting history: Originally a public bathhouse, it was transformed into a mosque in 1977 by a Turkish migrant worker organisation. The mosque's interior reflects both its former and current functions, combining traditional blue and white Northern German tiles with the colourful ornamentation of traditional Ottoman tiles. The exterior's naturalistic representations of heathen figures; typical ornamental elements of the *Jugendstil* epoch have been covered by the congregation. In 1990 the mosque was expanded to its current size by the addition of a complex containing the administrati-

History of the building housing the Centrum-Moschee

on, class rooms, apartments for Imams, while footing the two minarets and the dome.

The Islamic congregation milli görüs (IGMG) is the mother organisation of the mosque

Emblematic for the history of the congregation and the development of the mosque's mother organisation, the Islamic congregation *milli görüs* (*Islamische Gemeinschaft Milli Görüs e.V./IGMG.*), is the renaming of the mosque in 2001 to "*Islamische Gemeinde Hamburg – Centrum-Moschee e.V.*" (Islamic Congregation Hamburg – Central Mosque), illustrating a shift away from a Turkish-nationalistic to a transnationally operating migrant congregation tied into global Islam and the local context of Hamburg. In order to grasp the social space in which our informants received and receive the majority of their religious instruction and socialization, the history of IGMG in Germany, must be traced.

IGMG is under the scrutiny of the Verfassungsschutz

IGMG is one of the most controversial communities of Turkish Islam in Germany and has come under the scrutiny of the Verfassungsschutz<sup>1</sup>. In its annual reports the Verfassungsschutz has portrayed IGMG as a congregation with the goals of establishing a theocracy in Turkey, creating an Islamic parallel society in Germany, ultimately aiming for world domination of Islam (cf. *Verfassungsschutzbericht Hamburg* 2008). In 2006 a report stated that the Centrum-Moschee's bookstore sold children's DVDs with anti-Semitic content glorifying violence. The author suspects Turkish Islamists from IGMG being responsible for the sale of the DVDs (*Verfassungsschutzbericht Hamburg* 2007).

History of IGMG in Germany

In Germany IGMG arose in the early 1970s from the mosques that Turkish migrant workers established in cities. They turned to the mosques to alleviate their feeling of instability and futility (*Schiffauer* 2004). These first migrants also had a strong appendancy to Turkey. *Schiffauer* argues that in this environment a much stronger religiosity developed than in comparable social groups in Turkey.

The party agenda of Milli Görüs denominated IGMG in Germany

The congregations sought affiliation with newly founded Islamic parties in Turkey, one of them being Milli Selamet Partisi (or MSP) headed by Necmettin Erbakan. Under Erbakan IGMG became a transnational organisation with the dual character of a religious congregation in Germany and a political party in Turkey. The party agenda of Milli Görüs<sup>2</sup>, thus came to denominate IGMG in Germany. As a result of a coup d'état in Turkey, the Islamic Revolution in Iran and the invasion of Afghanistan, a revolutionary zeal developed among the congregations in Germany in 1980. Many radical Turkish imams were imported and spread their gospel among the congregations.

In the 1980s a reform phase began in the German IGMG

In 1983 the radical preacher Cemaleddin Kaplan and the majority of the mosques split off from IGMG in Germany. Thereafter Erbakan and his newly founded Refah Partisi (RP) instituted a consolidation and rebuilding phase. By the late 1980s a reform phase began in the German IGMG during which the organisation was restructured from a network to a corporation, introducing a European regional structure and competitiveness between mosques for members and donations. This process can be viewed as an implicit adaptation to the German organisational structures, marking a shift away from the Turkish party. IGMG positioned itself as a representative of a "pure Islam" unfettered by state control.

Many faithful Turkish migrants in Germany hoped that with the political victories of the RP in Turkey they could return home from diaspora, leave behind the humiliation and the feeling of otherness. Instead the Turkish military instigated another Coup D'état and forbade the RP. Despite the shattered dreams IGMG did not fall into a vacuum because by now the second generation had been integrated into the leadership of IGMG. They were able to overcome the social and economic depression within the organisation. *Schiffauer* makes the distinction between the both highly educated Turkish second generation and the "German" second generation. On arrival around 1980 the first group, born and educated in Turkey, gravitated to the mosques where they became active in youth work. Despite a strong connection to Turkey and often limited, yet functional, German skills they envisioned a permanent future in Germany.

*Schiffauer* divides the Turkish second generation from the 'German' second generation

The second group experienced their youth in the triangle of the religious family, the mosque and the German education system which equipped them with the competencies to participate in German society<sup>3</sup>. According to *Schiffauer* they are interested in achieving a synthesis between the two worlds they live in by creating a space in Europe that conforms to the sharia, while according to the laws of the state. They also claim the right for diversity and want it to be acknowledged by the German environment they live in.

Until 11th September 2001 IGMG had developed relatively unnoticed by the German public. Suddenly German society became interested in Islam and stumbled over some radical preachers remaining from the 1980s. The reform effort was not acknowledged by the German public; instead IGMG encountered an increase in suspicion. *Schiffauer* argues that German authorities maintained the image of the organisation from the early 1980s and saw the reform movement as an attempt to camouflage the real intention of creating an Islamic state in Turkey and Germany as precursor for global domination of Islam.

After 9/11 German society became interested in IGMG

The reforms also caused alienation between the second and the first generation, as many of the founding generation were taken aback by the opening of the organisation to the German context. Thus the leaders of the second generation have been in a precarious situation of maintaining a balance between the two groups. Also the connection to the party in Turkey has become an historic burden threatening the organisation in Europe as it continues an anti-Semitic and nationalistic rhetoric further.

Except for one case all of our informants qualify as highly educated second generation German Muslims. Many of them are active in mosque politics and engaged in the youth organisation. Thus they are both at the heart and product of the IGMG internal reform movement *Schiffauer* describes and which has become the agenda of major parts of IGMG.

Informants, presented in this study, qualify as highly educated second generation German Muslims

## Emerging analytical thread: Role of education and Islamic knowledge for Muslim youth

The role the Centrum-Moschee plays in the lives of our Muslim informants is central, but the physical space is less important to them than the social space of



- The social space of the mosque is important for the Muslims the mosque. In the interviews employing photo-elicitation we showed the informants an image of the mosque. The image produced less descriptive narratives (“the mosque is in a sad state”) or invoked reactions of pride or symbolic representation. Instead it often engendered a sense of both individual (“this is where I spent my childhood”) and collective belonging (“there I attend Islamic classes with my friends”), and in most cases the mosque is perceived as place of transmission of Islamic knowledge and education.
- Objectification of Islam Our material also resonates with what authors described as the *objectification of Islam* (Eickelmann/Piscatori 1996; Jacobsen 2006) and becomes apparent in a strong (rhetorical) opposition of the young Muslims to the traditional culture and culturally infused religion of their parents. Our informants point out the difference of how they acquired Islamic knowledge, which was by individual study mainly in the context of the mosque, whereas they described their parents as believers who “inherited” Islam from the older generation. This in the eyes of the young Muslims has led to an unreflexive practice of religion. They instead are in search of “real Islam” by reading the Qur’an, Sunna or the Hadithes other primordial sources considered to be purer than the traditional Islam of their parents. The arising question, whether or not this change affects how our informants practice religion will be further pursue in the future.
- Young Muslims are in opposition to the culturally infused religion of their parents
- Definition objectification Objectification then is what Jacobsen (cf. 2006, p. 218) formulates as the “emergence of a reflexive re-appropriation of religious tradition in the consciousness of many Muslims throughout the world”. One of the main driving forces is the domination of (a globalized) mass media and mass education, which enabled a widespread transmission of Islam leading to a pluralisation of discourses and institutions. In Europe the Islamic discourse has become especially contested vis à vis secularisation and is now losing its singularity by having to compete with other discourses and systems of beliefs and practices (Roy 2004). Life in plural and secular Europe has increased the quantity of choices Muslims can and must make, as opposed to their countries of origin. Our informants consciously chose to live their lives as actively and openly practicing Muslims.
- Göle introduces the dimension of power on Islamism Göle (cf. 2004) in her thoughts on Islamism<sup>4</sup> introduces the dimension of power. Religion plays an important role as a force that gives the suppressed the chance to transform a stigma into a source of self-empowerment and shame into self-respect. According to Göle (cf. 2004), the Islamic self is formed through religious discipline, but just as much through the effort to gain access to modern institutions and public acknowledgment. School is perceived as a space for individual progress, as well as social ascension and social integration.
- The mosque is the space where our Muslim informants embarked on a self-motivated, voluntary and conscious quest for Islamic knowledge, which is the foundation for forming and shaping the Muslim identity, which in turn is the prerequisite for developing the “ethical Islamic subject” (Jacobsen 2006) or what our informants call “a good Muslim”. Since in their view the family only sufficed in transmitting basic practical aspects of Islam, the mosque with its many educational offerings transmitting religious knowledge is where informants continued their religious education. Some of our informants have become Islamic Studies teachers themselves.

Our informants are driven by the will to achieve a better education, higher social status and participation in urban life and use the newly arising opportunities offered by migration, distancing themselves from their social roots, and from the local traditions. These values are not only reflected in their narratives but also in the official doctrine of IGMG and in the interviews with religious leaders of the Centrum-Moschee. *Göle* describes this process as the acquisition of a double symbolical capital, wordly and religious, in the Bourdieuan sense that allows them to move fluidly between the sphere of the mosque, mediate with the first generation and receive recognition in German society and in their social circle.

## Research Site II: Old Oslo/Grønland

Norway was a latecomer to post World War II “non-western” immigration. The first newcomers were labour migrants, mainly from Pakistan and Turkey, in the late 1960s. Since the immigration ban in 1975, immigrants to Norway have mainly come as refugees, asylum seekers, or in course of family reunions. Recently there has been considerable labour migration from new EU countries. The immigrant population<sup>5</sup> now makes up 9.7 percent of the population, the largest groups coming from Poland, Pakistan, Sweden, Iraq, Somalia, and Vietnam. Migration also changes the religious landscape, although still 85 percent of the population are members of the Church of Norway (Lutheran state church<sup>6</sup>).

Migration has changed Oslo more than other cities. Nearly 25 percent of people in Oslo have immigrant backgrounds, but these numbers are not the same throughout the city. Although levels of ethnic segregation are not high, minorities are concentrated in the inner and suburban east.

*Old Oslo* lies in the *inner east*, and was traditionally a working-class area. It has long been an entry port; many who gave up rural life in the 19<sup>th</sup> century settled here. It was later the first area where migrant ethnic minorities settled. Ethnic minority concentration made Old Oslo the object of political concerns in regards to “ghettoization” in the 1980s and 1990s. This concern is now to some degree being replaced by concern for the suburbs, as ethnic minorities are moving out of Old Oslo. Despite signs of gentrification, still 33.7 percent of the 39,500 residents in Old Oslo have “immigrant backgrounds”; among 6 to 19 year olds about 58 percent, and among 18–25 year-olds, 46 percent. Although Old Oslo is no longer the main minority residential area, its status as a minority *institutional centre* still applies and, in the last few years is even increasing. Oslo’s purpose-built mosques are all located here, and there is a Catholic church, with “users” of various migrant backgrounds. Old Oslo is also a *symbolic centre* for migration and multiculturalism in Norway and the main site for minority street youth. It has the highest crime-rate and by far the highest residential turnover in the city. However, it includes very different neighbourhoods. Next to minority dominated housing, there are areas with refurbished old wooden houses where practically all residents are “white”. We are focusing on a part of Old Oslo called *Grønland*, which is the most inner-city area, only a 10

Rising labour  
migration in Norway

25 percent of  
people in Oslo have  
an immigrant  
background



minutes walk from Parliament and Royal Palace. Grønland has a “vibe” of vibrancy and diversity. About 11.000 people live here.

Grønland has many mosques and several churches from which we recruited our informants:

### Churches, mosques, and samples

*Grønland church* is the local state church (Lutheran) congregation. Around 85 percent of people in Norway are members of the Church of Norway, but only about 50 percent in Grønland, reflecting the local migrant presence. Like all state church congregations, its parish extends to the surrounding neighbourhoods. Hence, very few members grow up in this church, as local schools have about 90 percent minority pupils, mostly Muslims. (Few majority Norwegian families with children live in the area.) In our age group, they attract quite a lot of students, mostly majority Norwegian. The church is interesting in terms of Grønland as a “religious place”. As most kids in the parish are Muslims, the church, to preserve a local function, downplays the Christian or “missionary” aspects of youth work, operates more as a community “social platform” and is the centre for religious dialogue in the area.

Grønland church –  
the local state  
church (Lutheran)  
congregation

*St. Hallvard church* is one of Oslo’s two Catholic churches, and serves the eastern parts of the city. Its young users have often grown up in the parish, but as Catholic parishes are much bigger than neighbourhoods, very few users actually live in the area. Almost all are religious commuters. They hold masses in several languages; Polish, Norwegian, Tamil, and Vietnamese. The church is full several times on Sundays. Especially masses in Polish are well attended.

St. Hallvard church –  
Catholic church

*Christianakirken*. (The church of Christiania) holds service in a coffee shop. It was established a few years ago, as an offspring of Oslo’s main Pentecostal congregation. Although formally Pentecostal, Christianiakirken is low-key, not focussing on charisma. They have 40 regular users, in their 20s and early 30s, predominantly majority Norwegians. Their core idea is that young religious identity today is more about social relations than about church buildings.

Christianakirken –  
The church of  
Christiania

*Østre Frikirke* (Eastern Non-Conformist Lutheran Church) is a “family church”. It is the congregation with the longest continuous history in the area. Many members can trace themselves back several generations. (In recent years, they have attracted some migrants.) This church is emblematic for Grønland’s history. By the 1950s, it ceased being a working class church, as members moved to the suburbs (this was the era of suburbanisation). In this period, migrants replaced many members from the white working-class. Today, users are commuters into the area. They have some 700 members, about 150 people at Sunday service.

Østre Frikirke – non-  
conformist Lutheran  
church

In addition to the 14 informants recruited from these churches, one is a resident in Grønland who goes to a church on the fringes of focus area, and two are Jehovah’s Witnesses who evangelizes in the area. Six informants have migrant history.

Of more than 10 mosques, we have concentrated on the purpose-built:

*Central Jamaat-e-Ahl-e-Sunnat* originates from the Pakistani *Barelwi* tradition (Sufi). It is one of Oslo's oldest Islamic congregations, from the mid-1970s. The present mosque opened in 2006, as Oslo's second purpose-built mosque. It is located at the heart of Grønland, and has a "fusion"/minimalist architecture. They have the biggest Muslim congregation in Scandinavia, with about 6.000 members and sometimes more than 1.000 visitors at Friday prayer. It welcomes anyone, but the majority of users have Pakistani backgrounds, as do the imams and the executive members. (This is the case for all visible mosques in Grønland.) People with Pakistani backgrounds are increasingly moving out of the area. (Somalis are now moving in.) Hence, Jamaat-e-Ahl-e-Sunnat is not the neighbourhood mosque it was. It used to have a reputation for being a mosque for people from rural Pakistan. They are now voicing *integrationism*: e.g. co-operating with the Norwegian Red Cross tutoring local school children (within the mosque premises).

Central Jamaat-e-Ahl-e-Sunnat – Islamic congregation

*World Islamic Mission* is an offspring from Jamaat e-Ahl-e-Sunnat. They seceded because of power struggles in the mid 1980s. Theologically, they are identical (*Barelwi*). WIM was Norway's first purpose-built mosque, finished in 1994, with traditional mosque architecture (two minarets, a dome, covered in blue mosaic). The architecture does not, like Jamaat-e-Ahl-e-Sunnat's, so much signify "Norwegian Islam" as "Islam in Norway". As with the other Pakistani mosques, its users increasingly live outside the area, reflecting raised residential aspirations. At the turn of the century, WIM was object of national dispute on the issue of calling to prayer. Partly for this reason, and because it was the first purpose-built, it is the best-known mosque in Norway and is a religio-geographical landmark.

World Islamic Mission – An offspring of Jamaat-e-Ahl-e-Sunnat and best known mosque in Norway

*Islamic Cultural Centre* belongs to the more normatively oriented Pakistani *Deobandi* tradition. At the time of writing, they have a temporary site on the outskirts of Grønland, while finishing a new mosque in the heart of Grønland (opens fall 2008). The architecture of the new ICC mosque is embedded in the architecture around it. It is built without loans as interest is *haram*. ICC dates back to the early 1970s, and has been active in terms of societal responsibility, has a history as a dialogue partner for government and has an active transnational network. Among Muslims in Oslo, the users probably have the highest educational level, and many of them – more than in the other mosques – come from urban settings in Pakistan.

Islamic Cultural Centre – belongs to Pakistani Deobandi tradition

## Preliminary findings: (1) Ethnicity/race as mediator and ocular signifier of religiosity. (2) Individualism.

I will briefly sketch some preliminary analyses. Intersections of religion, secularity and ethnicity have emerged as a key analytical thread that we are currently developing. One example: Norwegian young Muslim consciousness implies sorting out the relationship between *culture* and *religion*. It is a common argument that disputable practices like forced marriages and reproduction of the

Religion, secularity and ethnicity as a key analytical thread

caste system in the Norwegian context, are elements of tradition/culture, which has nothing to do with Islam (cf. *Jacobson* 1997). At the same time, *culture* and *religion* are intertwined in complex ways and often hard to distinguish (cf. *Jacobson* 2006, p. 142). It is not uncommon that Muslims, when asked about the importance of their parents and family in shaping their religious character, will answer in length about Pakistani *culture*.

Analysis represent a combination of the sociology of religion, white studies and Goffmanian sociology

Another analysis represents a combination of the sociology of religion, white studies (cf. *Doane* 1997, 2003; *Garner* 2006), and Goffmanian sociology (cf. *Goffman* 1992, 1986, 1969). We observe symbolic connections between “non-whiteness” and Islam on the one hand, and “whiteness” and non-religion on the other. Ethnicity and race act as “everyday ocular transmitters” of religiosity, and seem often to function as what Goffman termed “signs given off” (1992), the unintentional sign (a hijab or a cross are “signs given”, intentional). More precisely, whiteness is a religious *non*-signifier. Both non-Muslims and Muslims talk about how they often assume non-whites to be Muslims, and how “white Norwegianness” either *hides* religiosity, or signifies “secular”. This difference between whiteness and non-whiteness gives rise to different architectures of everyday interaction rituals. Whereas whiteness implies management of hidden religiosity – this is on the backdrop of secularism and privatized religion – the religious identity of, for instance, a Pakistani Norwegian is more “on the table” in face-to-face interaction (the *hijab* as an intentional sign strengthens this interaction dynamic). White Norwegians basically have an interactional “non-position”.

Other analysis use language of individualism to frame religious points of view

Another analysis circles around the tendency to frame standpoints vis-à-vis religion in a *language of individualism*. Although *Heelas* writes on New Age, his work on spirituality and de-traditionalization, especially how outer authorities are replaced by inner (cf. *Heelas* 1996, 2006), is of relevance here. Similar phenomena have been described by scholars on modern religion in general (cf. *Fenn* 2004, p. 3), and *Göle* has pointed out that religion becoming de-institutionalized and part of “expressive individualism” also includes European Muslims (cf. 2004, p. 112). Our material too suggests that tendencies of a *subjective turn* (*Heelas*) imply segments of Christian young, and to some degree (but in different ways) also Muslim young. In photo elicitation, we used an image of a pair of old hands folded over the Bible. This often produced talk on intergenerational changes; secularisation (in all samples), and (among Christians) religious de-traditionalization and movement in religious authority from the outside (traditions/clergy) to the inside (individual). We get adjacent answers from Muslims, albeit from oral questions. Muslims often underline the importance of seeking knowledge of and reflecting upon Islam on an individual basis. Compared to in their parents’ generation, Islam is much less of a *doxa* (*Bourdieu* 1977), i.e. collectively constituted taken for granted knowledge.

Muslims often stress the importance to reflect upon Islam on an individual basis

## Research Site III: Finsbury Park

### Profile of the Finsbury Park Station area of north London

The history of London is a history of migration whose complexity and variety grows ever more dense. Within London's population of 8 million its demographic patterns vary from borough to borough, with internal migration flows strongly influenced by local opportunity structures and earlier minority settlement. Roughly two million Londoners were born outside the UK – some 29 percent in its inner boroughs. Migrants also have an age structure skewed towards the working age and comprise 35 percent of London's working age population. Some 42 percent of the UK migrant population live in London. (GLA 2005, p.1.) The area of north London around Finsbury Park station, the site of our research, sits at a convergence of three boroughs – Haringey, Islington and Hackney, each with substantial minority ethnic populations. Some 44 percent of the population classify themselves as White British and the remaining 56 percent comprises of a mix of other ethnic groups, with White Other/White Irish being the second largest group, followed by Black African and Black Caribbean. Of these about 45 percent were born outside the UK. (Census 2001).

London has a complex history of migration

The station area itself is a major intersection of mass transport systems including national rail, two underground rail lines and bus terminals at either side on the train station. Many thousands of people flood through the area every day. The area is also a significant arrival point for migrant communities, particularly those of North African origin who are frequently housed locally, but there is also a growing number of East European migrants – the majority Polish Catholics – many of whom might be temporary residents. The Finsbury Park area also services a sizeable Jewish population in the abutting area of Stamford Hill, which is home to the highest concentration of Lubavitch and other orthodox Jews outside of Israel. This variety of white ethnicities adds to the ethnic and cultural diversity of an area that contains a large proportion of visible minorities including Pakistanis, Iraqis, Turkish (including a sizeable population of Kurds), Cypriots and Chinese. Prominent African groups include Somalis, Ethiopians and Eritreans. These once-migrant populations have loose associations with a range of religious buildings in the area, including the North Central London Mosque, the Finsbury Park Synagogue, Roman Catholic, Methodist, Pentecostal and Anglican Churches. In many cases, these different nationalities have rejuvenated dwindling congregations. Their concentration in this location has its links to many parts of the world and the interactions between religions, cultures, communities and nationalities play out locally and globally in many ways. The popular premier league football team, Arsenal, sits in the heart of the area and has set up a club for local youth that unites youngsters from Jewish and Muslim backgrounds. Local cafés run by Algerians but used by many Muslims commonly tune-in by satellite TV to the Friday service from Mecca. Chinese Christians from all over London come into the area to attend services at the Methodist church weekly. These examples could be multiplied a hundred fold.

Different migrant communities in Finsbury Park

The geographic landscape of the area reflects its diversity in terms of its religious congregations. There are two mosques that are located in the area: the North London Central Mosque, which became infamously associated with radical Islamism whilst Abu Hamza al-Masri was imam there. Removed from this post in 2003, he was replaced by a mainstream Muslim imam and individuals that make up the new board of trustees have been rebuilding its reputation. The other is the Muslim Welfare House. Senior staff at both of these mosques have been extremely helpful in facilitating our research and generous with their facilities. In between the two mosques stands a massive building, once a famous rock venue but now a Pentecostal church, headquarters of the international Universal Church of the Kingdom of God. The area also supports three traditional Pentecostal churches, plus a further two hosted within two Anglican churches, a Catholic church, and one Methodist church.

We have recruited our research participants from the following congregations:

Muslim Welfare House – A mosque with the functions of a community centre

*Muslim Welfare House (MWH) (Sunni):* The Muslim Welfare House, founded in 1970, is not only a mosque, but functions as an entire community centre, offering training centres, a youth centre, library and prayer rooms for both men and women. MWH acts as a social, cultural, learning and advice centre for more than 19 different nationalities, ranging from Algerians and Somalis, to Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, as well as some European converts. There are tailored activities specifically aimed at women, men, youth, refugees and the community at large, with Friday prayer increasing MWH's attendance levels further. Aiming to build bridges with different governmental and charitable organisations, to promote a dialogue and understanding within a multi-cultural society, according to its website, and to those officials we interviewed, MWH seeks to increase a sense of community participation and belonging. All of the Muslim participants in our research are recruited from this mosque. (cf. <http://www.mwht.org.uk>).

### Christian Churches

Universal Church of the Kingdom of God – A 'neo-Pentecostal' organisation

*Universal Church of the Kingdom of God.* The Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (UCKG) is the headquarters of national UCKG, an international 'neo-Pentecostal' organisation originating in Brazil and now with members in greater South America, Africa, the USA and in Europe (Freston 2001; Lehman 1996). It attracts a congregation of mainly Caribbean and African origin. With its strong emphasis on both spiritual and material human agency and its acquisition of the once famous rock venue the Rainbow Theatre, the UCKG represents a contrast to all of the other local Christian churches. Holding four services a day, seven days a week dedicated to issues such as finance, family life, and debt management as well as spiritual matters, it attracts very large numbers to its special events from its national branches and substantial numbers from north and east London to its regular services. It has sometimes been caught up in local controversy, just as the UCKG has in some other parts of the world. We have recruited 10 young adults, 4 of whom used to go to the Universal church but have since moved to a different Pentecostal church.

*St Mark's Church.* St Mark's is an Anglican church on the northern perimeter of our area which predominantly attracts a white population including British and other European nationalities. It holds two services plus two pre-service prayer meetings every Sunday and also organizes a number of activities designed to help and support the local community, including a 'narcotics anonymous' group. It is headed by a well-known and nationally famous (in Anglican circles) cleric who has a history of transforming small congregations into large and vibrant ones. Its traditional Gothic-style church building dates back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. We have recruited 6 participants from here. Some of whom were white/British; one was from Greece and another from Hungary.

St Mark's Church –  
An Anglican church

## Preliminary findings/reflections

Two of the most interesting features to emerge from our examination of religious faith amongst young people in this area of London are both intimately connected to geo-political issues. The first is the new dialogic engagements with faith found amongst Muslim youth; the other is the visibility of a re-evaluated materialism amongst migrant Christians in the Pentecostal UCKG. Each of these are set against the broader contemporary trend of a declining interest in symbolic form evident amongst some of the religious youth we interviewed. In the case of Muslim youth, of course, an avoidance of the representation of faith through structures of symbolic forms is a defining part of their religion. However, the emphasis of our informants on *direct* meaningful religious action through prayer, mosque attendance, study and debate, and a distrust of mediating forms, including cultural artifacts, is also echoed in many of our interviews with Pentecostals who are similarly concerned with a direct, unmediated relationship with the Holy Spirit. Both groups have little use for symbology and are distrustful of its spiritual mechanisms. The emphasis on personal commitment evident in both, in tandem with a driven clarity of purpose chimes well with a realism about purposefulness in the non-spiritual realm and is reflected in the matter-of-fact engagement with the every-day financial needs of their – often quite poor migrant – congregations. In the case of the UCKG this is explicitly brought into the frame through its financial and business advice work which is ideologically strongly tied to a philosophy of individual agency in both spiritual and material matters. In this it is very much in line with those other charismatic, Christianity-based groups concerned with the spiritual value of prosperity (Coleman 2000, *passim*; Noll 2002; Moore 1986), although it does not go as far as some of the American exponents of "prosperity religion" (Goff/Harvey 2004, p. 290).

Two important findings of the study: 1. Muslims show a new dialogic engagement with faith

2. Immigrant groups view material prosperity positively

To some degree this kind of emphasis does represent a 'new' departure in British religious focus certainly where material prosperity is no longer associated with excessive worldliness and possible greed but it is viewed positively, as part of one's religious responsibility to make the most of God's gifts. The success of these ideas amongst immigrant groups is likely to be connected with the need to create for themselves a more secure economic footing. We found less



evidence of this among the Anglicans, however where there was some explicit rejection of the worldly interest in wealth. In comparison to the Pentecostal and Muslim participants, the Anglican young men and women had a much more traditionally Christian spiritual approach to their religion.

New critical  
approach about  
faith in society

Within the three different groups of young people, Muslim, Christian and Non-Believers, religion and spirituality are perceived and experienced through a range of elements that play out in dialogical forms. These are evident, for example, in the ways the young Muslim men and women who were our informants, positioned themselves between the discursive contrast of their faith and their culture – a binary evident in much current debate in European Muslim circles. It can also be seen from the ways the young Muslims talked and positioned themselves towards common false and uncommon informed ideas of their faith. There appears to be a fresh critical approach and re-evaluation of, not only Islam and Muslim beliefs and ideas, but more generally about faith in society. By re-evaluating this through active and earnest discussion, these young people are developing their understandings about the representation and misrepresentation of Islam in European popular consciousness, empowering them to examine the truth or fallacy of sources of authority within their faith.

Both the strongly “source critical” approach of young Muslims to their explorations of their faith – relating as it does to the post 9/11 geo-political world and the representation of Islam within global media – and the material realism of the Pentecostal UCKG with its obvious appeal to its predominantly aspiring migrant following – relating as *it* does to global flows, post-coloniality and trans-national processes – position these trends well beyond their simple geographical location.

## Notes

- 1 For more information on the way how the Verfassungsschutz depicts IGMG see *Schiffauer* (2006)
- 2 Literally means: „national world-view“. The term “Milli” is a reference to “the people (millet) of Abraham”. Thus it is both an allusion to Muslims in general and to the Turkish people (*Schiffauer* 2004)
- 3 *Reinders* (2008) reports that despite the disadvantages and discrimination second generation Turkish migrant students face within the German school system, they are highly motivated to find a balance between Turkish and German culture, showing a strong increase in willingness to integrate and what he labels as integration acts, such as speaking German at home etc..
- 4 You can be born a Muslim but it is your conscious and individual choice to become an Islamist. Islamism rejects the given definitions of Islam because they are too submissive, instead calling for collective action and self-assertiveness in the face of modern and asymmetric power imbalances. Islamic action thus is determined by self-confident advocacy of religious diversity (cf. *Göle* 2002).
- 5 The National Bureau of Statistics uses the definition “people born abroad or by two foreign-born parents”.
- 6 The relations between the state and the Church of Norway are in the process of transformation. With the passing of a new law, the ties are loosened, but continued.

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